

Christian Community

A Program Service of the Council for Social Action of the
Congregational Christian Churches, 289 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y.,
and the Commission on Christian Social Action of the
Evangelical and Reformed Church, 2969 West 25th St., Cleveland 13, Ohio

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OUR CHURCHES LOOK AT ALCOHOL

The experience of the American people during the past three decades has demonstrated at least two significant facts about the consumption of beverage alcohol: First, that neither prohibition nor the repeal of prohibition has "solved" the problem of the excessive use of alcohol and the control of the liquor traffic. Second, that the churches have not discovered an effective, sound and Christian program of education and social action in relation to the problem.

To be sure, the national bodies of the various Protestant denominations have made pronouncements protesting irresponsible advertising and urging more adequate controls. Church school lesson courses included traditional temperance lessons which sometimes brought the subject in by force, or skirted the

controversial area with inoffensive platitudes. The Federal Council of Churches in December, 1946, adopted an excellent general statement on *The Church and Alcohol*. But, by and large, the approach has been one of scattered fire rather than consistent, reasoned, widely supported strategy.

During the war and postwar years, there developed a general realization that alcoholism and related consequences of heavy drinking were a serious problem. At the same time the churches came to feel the need of a more adequate approach.

Against this background, within a few years of each other, the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church (1944) and the General Council of the Congregational Christian

Churches (1948) called on their respective agencies of Christian education and Christian social action to cooperate in improving their programs of temperance education. Since the corresponding agencies in both groups had been given the same mandate, they felt it would be well to approach their assignment jointly.

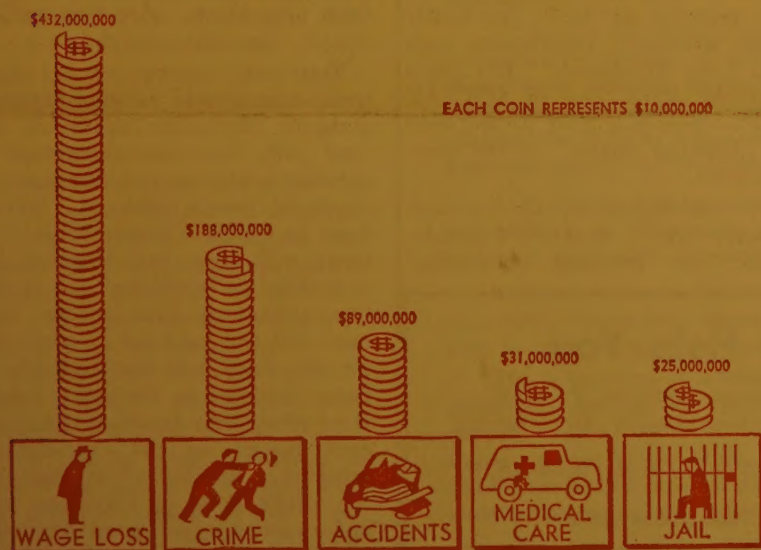
A Statement is Drafted

Inviting representatives of the laymen's, women's, and youth organizations as well as representative pastors to participate, they called a two-day conference in New York City, December 14 and 15, 1949. At this meeting the question of alcohol education was discussed from the standpoints of scientific theory, Christian ethics, denominational history, and the experience of other denominations and non-church agencies working in the field.

This meeting revealed significant differences of opinion within each denomination's delegation. On no issue were the divergences along denominational lines. Yet as discussion proceeded certain broad and basic agreements emerged. These were embodied in a draft statement drawn up by a committee, revised by the entire conference, and subsequently edited by staff representatives. This draft was further amended and rewritten by the Council for Social Action and the Commission on Christian Social Action in joint consultation in February, 1950. As finally adopted by these councils, it was submitted to the General Council of the Congregational Christian Churches and the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in June.

The Congregational Christian Gen-
(Continued on Page 4, Column 1)

WHAT ALCOHOLISM COST US - 1940



GRAPHIC ASSOCIATES FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS COMMITTEE, INC.

This graphic illustration of the cost of alcoholism to America in one year is based on a study by Benson Y. Landis of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America. (From Public Affairs Pamphlet, "Alcoholism is a Sickness." Used by permission.)

How to Have a Helpful Discussion On the Alcohol Problem

All too many discussions of the alcohol problem wind up in either confusion or anger. Not only do people have strong opinions about drinking. They feel keenly about it. Thus the moderate drinker, when the subject is introduced, may say abruptly: "Let's forget it. Isn't everyone sick and tired of hearing about alcohol?" The teetotaler is capable of outbursts, too. Strong emotions are engendered at the prospect of what drinking may do to young people, or what it is sometimes doing to adults.

But perhaps the most common attitude is one of indifference. The modern community has sharpened so many personal and social problems that alcoholism and drunkenness seem to be of minor significance. Particularly in the urban or suburban areas, the problem for the class or discussion leader is often to convince people that there is an alcohol problem.

Using the Statement

As elsewhere reported, the statement on "The Churches and Alcohol Education" is the result of several days discussion by a group of fellow Christians. Broad difference in points of view were disclosed. "However," as the statement says, "we present the following formulation of minimum standards for personal conduct as a working basis for a program of action." That a better statement of principles is desired is evident. Thus, the present one ought not to be used as a *final* or *definitive* guide to Christian thinking. Rather, it may be offered to a discussion group as something from which to start.

Begin With Religion, Not Ethics

Man's use, abuse, or non-use of alcoholic beverages—as of other things—has to be seen in light of his stewardship to God. The Gospel rule is that we should love him with all our heart, *mind*, and strength. It is also that we should serve him in every act.

The discussion leader may well remind the group, at the outset, that Christian ethical teachings are not a set of laws. Christian living is the outgrowth of a spiritual life, nourished by prayer, study and meditation, and inspired by the central figure of our Lord. *It is the spirit and not the letter that counts.* Equally earnest Christians may differ in opinion about many things, and still unite in the fellowship of study and action.

A Prime Problem: The Alcoholic

One of the easiest ways to get people into discussion is to invite attention to the alcoholic. Why is it that some people become addicted and not others? What is the difference between *compulsive* drinking and *voluntary* drunkenness?

The distinction between voluntary drunkenness and addiction ought to be sharply made. Members of Alcoholics Anonymous are usually willing to relate their experiences. Perhaps an AA can be invited to join the group. If not, there is material at hand graphically describing alcoholics' experiences, such as "The Lost Week-end." On pages 22-26 of the April issue of SOCIAL ACTION there is a brief presentation of the "drinking phases" in the alcoholic's history.

To be underscored are the pre-alcoholic symptoms: week-end drunks, black-outs, the "sneaking of drinks."

Even more serious is the symptom of losing control over the amounts drunk. By then the drinker is well on his way to becoming the drunkard. It is important for the public—and drinkers—to realize the meaning of such episodes.

"Voluntary Drunkenness Is Wrong"

If you begin with the fourth point—"Alcoholics are sick persons and must be so treated"—you might logically suggest next a discussion of why "Voluntary drunkenness is wrong." The Bible treats drunkenness as a soul-destroying sin. Numerous passages may be found by using a concordance.

Yet why is it that the public at large and church members in particular tend to look upon drunkenness and drunken behavior as "funny?" You might ask: "Why do we laugh when we watch the antics of a drunk in public, or on the screen or stage?" And also: "Then why do we turn around and condemn such behavior when an accident happens involving an intoxicated person, or when parents bring harm to children through alcoholic indulgence?"

The point to stress is that as Americans we are ambivalent, or have contradictory tendencies, toward drunkenness. And that is, to be sure, part of the problem. The failure to maintain a constant viewpoint is a contributory factor in intemperance.

The Limitations In Drinking

The second point in the statement has to do with the conditions under which alcoholic beverages may be used. Read them over aloud. Are they sufficiently clear? Complete enough?

You may expect warm objections from some people at the juncture. A perfectly legitimate Christian ethical view calls for total abstinence. The question is whether it is mandatory—and plenty of people think so. Some who want to equate Christianity with abstinence will deny that there can be any such thing as "moderate" use of alcohol. One answer to them is that "moderation" has to be defined in terms of people who drink, and not those who don't. Some drinkers, on the other hand, will want to see very broad constructions indeed placed on the "conditions" of drinking. An answer to them is that the whole body of Christian teaching and experience insists on *abstinence* or on *very little drinking*. Can the Christian ethically justify large expenditures for alcoholic beverages? Or drinking before driving? Or drinking when drunkenness is deliberately sought? On

Agencies Which Can Help You

Alcoholics Anonymous, Box 459, Grand Central Annex, New York 17, N. Y.

National Committee for Education on Alcoholism, 2 East 103rd St., New York 29, N. Y.

National Committee on Alcohol Hygiene, Inc., 2030 Park Avenue, Baltimore 17, Maryland.

Yale School of Alcohol Studies, 52 Hillhouse Ave., New Haven, Conn.

The Summer School of Alcohol Studies conducted at Yale University each summer accepts qualified ministers and educators as students. Scholarship assistance is given to approved applicants. Applications for enrollment should be secured by ministers through the social action agency of their own denomination well in advance of the April deadline.

scientific grounds, does not the *regular* use of alcoholic beverages—when missed at the usual time—suggest intemperance? Or that the taking of only a certain *amount* of beverage each day proves moderation?

Abstinence: The Better Way

The effort to compel abstinence through legal means has many times failed. People will not abide by a law they do not believe in. They resist also any brow-beating attempts to get them to do what they have a "right" to do. Among other things, they have the "right" to drink.

But the first point in the policy statement is plainly put: "Abstinence is the rule of prudence." Drinking of alcohol in beverages makes behavior *unpredictable*. There is always the possibility of developing a *dependency* on it, or alcoholism. Further, the question of the effect of one's own practices on others arises. The Christian cannot accept entire personal responsibility for the conduct of others; but he has to face the question of his *influence* on their choices. Is it better to avoid the possibility of a personal tragedy through abstinence, or not? Is it not worthy to give up that which is permissive, such as the occasional or minimal use of alcoholic beverages, in the hope that others may be helped?

Conclusion

Our comments here have been with respect to the adult discussion group. *The alcohol problem is essentially the problem of adults, not of children.* But children do need in public and church school to know some of the scientific facts about alcoholic beverages. They deserve to be made aware of dangers, and of the moral questions.

Will your adult group not undertake to see that some educational emphasis is made in children's classrooms and programs? Will they not participate in a movement in behalf of better treatment of alcoholics, who are everywhere so much in need of medical and community care? Will they not assist in launching a public educational campaign against "drinking drivers?"

The test of a good discussion is whether—when it is over—people with varying personal points of view are ready to unite in some definite program. *Any local group that is convinced that intemperance and alcoholism are major health and moral threats to our nation and to our faith will quickly discover constructive steps to take.*

The Churches and Alcohol Education

Alcoholism and the misuse of alcohol are among the many grave problems which Christians confront in modern society. Both personal and social consequences are involved. Intemperance is a destructive force in family life, a factor in industrial and traffic accidents; it occasions private and public economic losses, and is a contributing cause in many illnesses. The alcohol problem is not only a major one in the field of public health and welfare. It is also one with profound religious and moral implications.

The religious significance of this problem is rooted in our conviction that God has entrusted man with life, the world and all created things. Any use of these which obstructs right relations between man and God, and man and his fellows is sin; and the result of personal sin is social evil. As Christians, members of churches—both laity and clergy—we confess our indifference and ineffectiveness in dealing with this whole issue. We have been remiss in studying the personal and social causes of intemperance, too easily accepting or rejecting the teachings and customs of the past. We have failed to provide an adequate program of education. We have let inertia take the place of social action on this vital issue.

We therefore now pledge ourselves and call upon our churches and church members to make a careful examination of the facts available to us through modern science, to interpret them in the light of Christian principles, to make such pronouncements and take such actions as we may be led to pursue under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We recognize that there is wide difference of opinion on this personal and social question among sincere and honest Christians. However, we present the following formulation of minimum standards for personal conduct as a working basis for a program of action. We recommend them for the consideration of our churches and their members. We charge the agencies of Social Action and Christian Education with the responsibility of developing a program of study and action upon this basis:

1. *Abstinence is the rule of prudence.* The results of the use of alcohol are not specifically predictable. However, it frequently intensifies other human problems, individual and social. Any individual's behavior may have a serious influence upon the moral character and conduct of another. Modern living requires exceptional skills which are frequently affected by the use of alcohol. A substantial proportion of those who start to drink become addicted to the use of alcoholic beverages.

2. *Any use of alcoholic beverages must respect such conditions* as (a) there should be the intention of and capacity for avoiding drunkenness, (b) there should be no drinking before the assumption of responsibilities such as driving, using vocational skills or making important decisions, (c) there should be no drinking that leads to a dependence upon alcohol, and (e) no substantial part of a person's income can justifiably be spent for such a purpose.

3. *Voluntary drunkenness is wrong.* The repudiation of individual moral responsibility in deliberately getting drunk is a sin against God. It is also a menace to the health and welfare of one's self and one's neighbors.

4. *Alcoholics are sick persons and must be so treated.* The resources of medicine, social sciences and religion should be used for their rehabilitation. In many areas far more adequate personnel and facilities are needed.

The formulation of a better statement of principles, the development of an educational program, the improvement of our counseling and ministry to those afflicted, hearty cooperation with the Federal Council of Churches and with secular agencies aiming at the same ends, the support of suitable legislation and social control, these and others are the tasks for the future. May God give us wisdom, courage and the will to perform them.

Approved by the General Council of Congregational Christian Churches.

Referred to the churches for study by the General Synod of the Evangelical and Reformed Church.

June, 1950.

Our Churches Look at Alcohol

(Continued from Page 1)

eral Council adopted the statement as presented. The Evangelical and Reformed General Synod, because of limits of time imposed on debate by other business, did not vote on the statement but voted instead to refer it to pastors and congregations for study. It therefore bears official approval in the one case and strong recommendation for serious consideration in the other.

What the Statement Says

The statement, which is printed in full on page 3 of this issue of *Christian Community*, does not pretend to be a final and exhaustive pronouncement on all phases of the alcohol question. It is intended as a beginning and foundation for further elaboration, action, and educational material. It moves through four stages:

A. It asserts the importance of the problem in terms of both the social effect and the spiritual principle involved.

B. It calls upon the churches to study the problem and act upon the basis of their Christian understanding.

C. It recognizes differences in opinion and practice among Christians.

D. It sets forth four principles as guides or landmarks in defining personal practice, Christian teaching, and church program. (See paragraphs numbered 1, 2, 3, 4).

What the Statement Does Not Say

The statement as prepared does not say that the person who does not drink is thereby made a better Christian than the person who does on occasion do so. It does not permit the total abstainer to be self-righteous about his position. *Neither does it condone the irresponsible use of alcoholic beverages. It attempts to recognize all of the positions which exist with reference to the use of alcohol, to speak a serious word to those maintaining each, and to affirm the church's responsibility in relation to each.*

Thus the statement says to the person who voluntarily or deliberately cultivates intoxication, "Such behavior is a sin against God, against neighbor, and against self." (Paragraph No. 3). It says to the alcoholic (the person whose drunkenness is no longer the result of deliberate choice but an involuntary, "compulsive" thing), "You are a sick man and you need help." (Paragraph No. 4). It is recognized, of course, that any given case may be on the border so that one cannot say whether it belongs in Group 3 or Group 4. But the principle is clear, is it not? Insofar as the element of *volition* is present, the individual is accountable. Insofar as the element of *compulsion* is effective, the subject is ill.

It says to the person who makes abstinence the rule of his life, "Yours is the *prudent* course, the sure way to avoid the evils of alcohol and the grosser evil of a bad example; if your position is based on such understanding rather than on some feeling of superior virtue, it is the wisest way." (Paragraph No. 1).

It says to the person who believes that responsible Christian living is not incompatible with occasional, moderate use of beverage alcohol, "If you are going to try that, you have to face *this* and *this* and *this*" (as, items a, b, c, d, e in Paragraph No. 2).

Springboard for Action

Such a statement is obviously not a blueprint. It is rather a springboard for action. Supplementary reading and suggestions for discussion are provided in this issue of *Christian Community*. More extensive help will be found in the April, 1950, issue of *Social Action* magazine. It is hoped that this statement will be followed by educational materials, prepared by qualified writers, adapted to the use of various age and interest groups. These will deal with the many specific questions which any such pronouncement at once raises.

It should serve to remind pastors and officers in all of our churches of their responsibility to minister to the alcoholic and his family, to provide young people and their parents with scientific information and Christian interpretation, and to attack community problems

CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY

Requests for regular mailings or additional copies for Congregational Christians should be addressed to Ray Gibbons, Director, Council for Social Action, 289 Fourth Avenue, New York 10, New York. Requests by Evangelical and Reformed, and others, as well as news items and communications, should be addressed to the Editor, Huber F. Klemme, Commission on Christian Social Action, 2969 West 25th Street, Cleveland 13, Ohio.

Recommended Reading

FOR FURTHER INTERPRETATION

Alcoholism and Religion, by Francis W. McPeck. April, 1950, issue of *Social Action*, 289 Fourth Ave., New York 10, N. Y. Single copies, 15 cents each; fifty or more, 10 cents each.

FOR GENERAL INFORMATION ON ALCOHOL PROBLEMS

Alcohol, Science and Society, published by the *Quarterly Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 52 Hillhouse, New Haven, Conn., 473 pages, \$5.00. Contains 29 lectures and discussions from the 1945 summer session of the Yale School of Alcohol Studies.

Alcohol Explored, by H. W. Haggard and E. M. Jellinek, New York: Doubleday, Doran and Company, 1942, \$2.75. Data are not current, but interpretations are popularly presented.

FOR EDUCATORS

Alcohol and Social Responsibility, by Raymond G. McCarthy and Edgar M. Douglass, New York: Thomas Y. Crowell and Yale Plan Clinic, 1949, 304 pages, \$3.50. An excellent summary of current facts and an outline of an educational approach for use in public and other schools.

FOR CHURCH SCHOOL WORKERS

Alcohol and People, by Clifford Earle, a handbook for church leaders published by the Division of Social Education and Action, Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, Pa., 1950, 75 pages. Gives brief factual statements on the various phases of the alcohol problem, and outlines a suggested church program.

FOR PASTORS

Helping Alcoholics, by Seward Hiltner, Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., Witherspoon Building, Philadelphia, Pa., 1949. A free pamphlet for ministers containing suggestions with reference to counseling of the alcoholic and family.

arising out of the sale and use of alcohol, with a forthrightness and balance which can come only from a sound Christian point of view.